

Fiscal Year 2011 Military Construction-VA Bill Clears House

Washington, DC - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) this week voted in the House to pass the Fiscal Year 2011 Military Construction-VA Appropriations Bill, which builds on previous efforts to increase funding for veterans health care and other services, while also upgrading military facilities across the country. Hinchey, who serves on the House Appropriations Committee, has supported the legislation throughout the legislative process. The bill now awaits Senate action.

"One of the ways we can honor the sacrifice being made by our troops and their families is to ensure they are provided the health care and other benefits they've earned and been promised," said Hinchey who joined the U.S. Navy after graduating from high school and served in the Pacific Ocean on the destroyer U.S.S. Marshall. "With the passage of this legislation, the House has now approved a 70 percent increase in funding for veterans health care and benefits since January 2007. This is a historic effort we are undertaking to ensure that we do right by those who serve this country, and I'm hopeful that we can do even more in the future."

The legislation, in concert with previous bills, is helping the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) bring on over 10,000 new claims processors to reduce case backlogs. To improve health care services, the legislation continues funding for nearly 3,400 doctors and more than 14,000 nurses, 145 community-based outpatient clinics, 92 new Vet Centers, and more than 47,000 additional Veterans Health Administration employees. In addition, the bill continues last year's first ever two-year advance appropriations for VA, the highest priority of major national veterans' groups, to ensure dependable funding of veterans health care.

The bill provides \$56.8 billion in discretionary funding for the VA, \$64 billion for mandatory VA programs and \$18.7 billion for military construction and family housing. In addition, the bill provides \$50.6 billion in advance appropriations for VA medical accounts. These investments will help the VA undertake several new priorities, including:

- Maintaining advance funding for veterans health benefits to ensure stable and uninterrupted services;
- Processing newly eligible VA claims for Agent Orange presumptive disabilities;
- Providing new family caregiver benefits for disabled veterans;
- Strengthening the VA workforce to tackle claims backlogs and to process new educational

benefits;

- Accelerating the Army's program to modernize troop housing for trainees;
- Addressing critical unfunded construction requirements of the Guard and Reserve;
- Expediting environmental cleanup on closed military bases.

Earlier this year, Hinchey also voted to pass the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act, which is now providing support to families who care for disabled, ill or injured veterans, enhancing health services for 1.8 million women veterans, expanding mental health services, and improving access to health care for veterans in rural areas.